

House File 21 - Introduced

HOUSE FILE 21

BY HUNTER

A BILL FOR

1 An Act relating to the choice of doctor to treat an injured
2 employee under workers' compensation laws and including
3 applicability date provisions.

4 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

1 Section 1. Section 85.27, subsection 4, Code 2015, is
2 amended to read as follows:

3 4. a. (1) For purposes of this section, the employer is
4 obliged to furnish reasonable services and supplies to treat an
5 injured employee, and has the right to choose the care unless
6 the employee has predesignated a physician as provided in
7 paragraph "b". If the employer chooses the care, the employer
8 shall hold the employee harmless for the cost of care until the
9 employer notifies the employee that the employer is no longer
10 authorizing all or any part of the care and the reason for
11 the change in authorization. An employer is not liable for
12 the cost of care that the employer arranges in response to a
13 sudden emergency if the employee's condition, for which care
14 was arranged, is not related to the employment. The treatment
15 must be offered promptly and be reasonably suited to treat the
16 injury without undue inconvenience to the employee.

17 (2) If the employee has reason to be dissatisfied with the
18 care offered, the employee should communicate the basis of
19 such dissatisfaction to the employer, in writing if requested,
20 following which the employer and the employee may agree to
21 alternate care reasonably suited to treat the injury. If the
22 employer and employee cannot agree on such alternate care, the
23 commissioner may, upon application and reasonable ~~proofs~~ proof
24 of the necessity therefor, allow and order other care. In an
25 emergency, the employee may choose the employee's care at the
26 employer's expense, provided the employer or the employer's
27 agent cannot be reached immediately.

28 (3) An application made under this ~~subsection~~ paragraph
29 "a" shall be considered an original proceeding for purposes
30 of commencement and contested case proceedings under section
31 85.26. The hearing shall be conducted pursuant to chapter
32 17A. Before a hearing is scheduled, the parties may choose
33 a telephone hearing, an audio-video conference hearing, or
34 an in-person hearing. A request for an in-person hearing
35 shall be approved unless the in-person hearing would be

1 impractical because of the distance between the parties to the
2 hearing. The workers' compensation commissioner shall issue a
3 decision within ten working days of receipt of an application
4 for alternate care made pursuant to a telephone hearing or
5 audio-video conference hearing or within fourteen working days
6 of receipt of an application for alternate care made pursuant
7 to an in-person hearing. The employer shall notify an injured
8 employee of the employee's ability to contest the employer's
9 choice of care pursuant to this ~~subsection~~ paragraph "a".

10 b. (1) An injured employee has the right to choose care,
11 unless care needs to be provided at the job site in response to
12 a life-threatening emergency, if the employee has predesignated
13 a physician who is a primary care provider, who has previously
14 provided medical treatment to the employee and has retained
15 the employee's medical records, to provide treatment for the
16 injury. Upon hire and periodically during employment, an
17 employer shall provide written notice to all employees who have
18 not yet predesignated a physician, of their rights under this
19 paragraph "b" to predesignate such a physician for treatment of
20 an injury, in a manner prescribed by the workers' compensation
21 commissioner by rule. The employer or the employer's insurer
22 shall not coerce or otherwise attempt to influence an injured
23 employee's choice of a physician to provide care. An employee
24 shall, as soon as practicable, notify the employer of an
25 injury, and upon receiving such notice of an injury from an
26 employee, the employer shall again provide written notice to
27 that employee of the employee's rights under this paragraph
28 "b" in a manner prescribed by the workers' compensation
29 commissioner by rule. If an employer fails to notify employees
30 of their right to choose a physician as provided in this
31 paragraph "b", the employee has the right to choose any
32 physician to provide treatment for the injury and the treatment
33 shall be considered care authorized under this section.

34 (2) For the purposes of this paragraph "b", "physician"
35 includes an individual physician, a group of physicians, or

1 a clinic. For the purposes of this paragraph "b", "primary
2 care provider" means an employee's personal physician who is
3 licensed to practice medicine and surgery, osteopathic medicine
4 and surgery, or osteopathy in this state or in another state
5 and provides primary care and who is a family or general
6 practitioner, a pediatrician, an internist, an obstetrician,
7 or a gynecologist. A physician who practices in another
8 state shall not be predesignated by an employee unless the
9 physician's office is located within sixty miles of where
10 the employee is employed or was injured unless the workers'
11 compensation commissioner allows otherwise. A physician chosen
12 by an injured employee to provide treatment is authorized to
13 arrange for any consultation, surgical consultation, referral,
14 emergency care, or other specialized medical services as the
15 physician deems necessary to treat the injury. The employer
16 shall pay for all such care, unless the workers' compensation
17 commissioner determines otherwise.

18 (3) If the employer has reason to be dissatisfied with the
19 care chosen by the employee, the employer should communicate
20 the basis of such dissatisfaction to the employee, in writing
21 if requested, following which the employee and the employer may
22 agree to alternate care reasonably suited to treat the injury.
23 If the employee and employer cannot agree on such alternate
24 care, the commissioner may, upon application and reasonable
25 proof of the necessity therefor, allow and order other care.

26 (4) An application made under this paragraph "b" shall be
27 considered an original proceeding for purposes of commencement
28 and contested case proceedings under section 85.26. The
29 hearing shall be conducted pursuant to chapter 17A. Before
30 a hearing is scheduled, the parties may choose a telephone
31 hearing, an audio-video conference hearing, or an in-person
32 hearing. A request for an in-person hearing shall be approved
33 unless the in-person hearing would be impractical because of
34 the distance between the parties to the hearing. The workers'
35 compensation commissioner shall issue a decision within ten

1 working days of receipt of an application for alternate care
2 made pursuant to a telephone hearing or audio-video conference
3 hearing or within fourteen working days of receipt of an
4 application for alternate care made pursuant to an in-person
5 hearing.

6 Sec. 2. Section 85.39, Code 2015, is amended to read as
7 follows:

8 **85.39 Examination of injured employees.**

9 1. a. After an injury, the employee, if requested by the
10 employer, shall submit for examination at some reasonable
11 time and place and as often as reasonably requested, to a
12 physician or physicians authorized to practice under the laws
13 of this state or another state, without cost to the employee;
14 but if the employee requests, the employee, at the employee's
15 own cost, is entitled to have a physician or physicians
16 of the employee's own selection present to participate in
17 the examination. If an employee is required to leave work
18 for which the employee is being paid wages to attend the
19 requested examination, the employee shall be compensated at
20 the employee's regular rate for the time the employee is
21 required to leave work, and the employee shall be furnished
22 transportation to and from the place of examination, or the
23 employer may elect to pay the employee the reasonable cost of
24 the transportation. The refusal of the employee to submit
25 to the examination shall suspend the employee's right to any
26 compensation for the period of the refusal. Compensation shall
27 not be payable for the period of suspension.

28 b. If an evaluation of permanent disability has been made by
29 a physician retained by the employer and the employee believes
30 this evaluation to be too low, the employee shall, upon
31 application to the commissioner and upon delivery of a copy of
32 the application to the employer and its insurance carrier, be
33 reimbursed by the employer the reasonable fee for a subsequent
34 examination by a physician of the employee's own choice, and
35 reasonably necessary transportation expenses incurred for the

1 This bill relates to the choice of a physician to treat an
2 injured employee under the state's workers' compensation laws.
3 The bill allows the employer to choose care unless the employee
4 has predesignated a physician as provided in the bill.

5 The bill gives an employee the right to predesignate a
6 physician who is a primary care provider, who has previously
7 provided treatment to the employee and has retained the
8 employee's medical records, to provide treatment for a
9 work-related injury. The employer is required to provide
10 written notice to employees of this right upon hire, and
11 periodically during employment, and upon receiving notice of
12 an injury from an employee who has not yet predesignated a
13 physician of their right to do so, in a manner prescribed by
14 the workers' compensation commissioner. An employer or an
15 employer's insurer shall not coerce or otherwise attempt to
16 influence an injured employee's choice of a physician.

17 If the employer fails to provide such notification, an
18 injured employee has the right to choose any physician to
19 provide treatment for the work-related injury and that
20 treatment shall be considered authorized care.

21 If the employer or employee is dissatisfied with the care
22 chosen by the other party, the dissatisfied party is required
23 to communicate the basis of dissatisfaction to the other
24 party in writing and the parties may agree to alternate care
25 reasonably suited to treat the injury. If the parties cannot
26 agree to such alternate care, the dissatisfied party may make
27 an application for alternate care to the commissioner.

28 An application for alternate care is an original proceeding
29 and is treated as a contested case. A party may request that
30 the hearing be held in person, by telephone, or by audio-video
31 conference. The commissioner is required to issue a decision
32 within 10 working days of receipt of an application made
33 pursuant to a telephone hearing or audio-video conference
34 hearing and within 14 days of an in-person hearing.

35 Code section 85.39 is amended to provide that if the

1 employee has chosen care, when it is medically indicated that
2 no significant improvement from an injury is anticipated, the
3 employee may obtain a medical opinion regarding the extent
4 of the employee's permanent disability from the employee's
5 physician. If the employer believes that the evaluation of
6 permanent disability obtained by the employee is too high, the
7 employer has the right to obtain another medical opinion from a
8 physician of the employer's choosing.

9 The bill applies to injuries occurring on or after January
10 1, 2016.